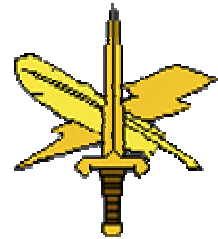




NEWS RELEASE

**Public Affairs Office
Fort Riley, KS 66442
Telephone (785) 239-3033/3410 FAX (785) 239-2592
After Hours (785) 239-2222
E-mail: stephanie.perrin@riley.army.mil or
skidmord@riley.army.mil
www.riley.army.mil**



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
Stephanie Perrin, Assistant Media Relations Officer (785) 239-3033

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TEAM LEARNS COMBAT DRIVING

By Lisa Litchfield
Task Force Dagger PAO

Soldiers and Sailors of the Military Transition Team Class 03 recently improved their driving skills at the new Combat Driver's Training course at Fort Riley. The course required trainees to navigate an on- and off-road obstacle course set up to resemble combat conditions faced by American forces deployed overseas.

The Combat Driver's Training Course is run by 2nd Brigade, 91st Division (Training Support), the primary unit responsible for training Military Transition Teams at Fort Riley.

The 2-mile stretch of road exposes trainees to a series of obstacles they have to negotiate, maneuver around or push out of the way. Trainees are instructed how to traverse obstacles on a highway or off the road and in low visibility conditions.

Capt. Michael Volpe, the officer in charge of the course, said the training is unique from regular driver's training because of its focus.

"In driver's training, we are teaching someone how to drive the Army standard within a certain set of events. This [combat driver's training] training is a lot more combat oriented," he said.

"Garrison training is designed to teach people the basic maintenance of the average Army vehicle and ordinary driving skills. We take that training and build on it so they can be confident and competent when they are out facing situations in the wild," he continued.

Volpe said one of the reasons this form of driver's training is so important is "Soldiers will be driving on the Iraqi roads more often than [they] will engage in combat. We give them the skills and confidence necessary to maneuver a six-ton vehicle through the Iraqi traffic in combat and non-combat conditions."

Combat Driver's Training has received encouraging feedback from deployed Soldiers. "We have gotten comments from teams downrange that this training has been of

immense value [in Iraq]," Volpe said. He noted that the training to prevent or prepare trainees for roll-over accidents has already saved lives.

The Combat Driver's Training course takes place on three tracks designed to simulate combat conditions or hazards the trainees may face in Iraq.

The first is a series of broken and overturned vehicles blocking the highway. The second is a chain of rugged off-road terrain features on the steep angles of a hillside. The third is a section of road the trainees drive down at night while wearing night vision goggles.

Trainees of MiTT Class 03 said they believed this training would increase their chances of mission success in Iraq. Maj. John Best, one of the MiTT trainees, said, "Most of the operations we will be conducting in Iraq will consist of mounted patrols using 'Humvees.' The experience we gain here will be absolutely invaluable in preparing us for the obstacles we are going to face."

Petty Officer 1st Class Joseph Elkins, a Sailor undergoing MiTT training with Class 03, is preparing for his first land-based deployment in a combat zone. Elkins said before Combat Driver's Training he had never driven a "Humvee."

One of the first things Elkins said he learned was "Humvees" are built for function and not for appearance or comfort.

Elkins said, although he has operated a "Humvee" only a few times, he feels confident using one because "we have really good instructors out here. The training is grueling, but not anything a Sailor couldn't handle."

Underscoring the importance of the training, Volpe said, "I want [the trainees] to walk away knowing this vehicle is a durable, safe and efficient combat platform and that they are confident in their ability to maneuver these vehicles in combat."